THE 2010 ADULT BIBLE CONTEST:
THE FIRST IN 30 YEARS

JOSHUA J. ADLER

This past Hanukkah, I watched the first televised adult Bible contest in Jerusalem in 30 years with mixed feelings. On the one hand, it was wonderful to have this contest renewed after such a long time. On the other hand, it was disappointing because it failed to provide a new format or innovations; it merely seemed like a copy of the international Hidon Ha-Tanakh for Jewish youth which has been taking place annually for the past 47 years.

Perhaps the person most especially moved by this renewed contest was Dr. Avshalom Kor, who for years has been the dynamic Master of Ceremonies at the youth Hidon and has often expressed his hope for a renewal of the adult Bible competition. Although he and many others, such as Israel's former president, Yitzhak Navon, had in past years expressed such a wish, it took Prime Minister Netanyahu's administration to finally implement it.

There were many similarities between the adult contest and that of the Hidon for youth: the format was quite similar and the MC was the same, as well as the chief judge, Navon. Here also, as at the annual contest, there were speeches (though even longer than those at the youth Hidon) by both the Minister of Education, Gideon Saar, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. In addition, ex-President Navon decided that he too should make a speech and so at least a third of the program was devoted to speeches rather than to the Tanakh contest.

For the adult Hidon there were fourteen competitors (who had already won regional contests) sitting on the dais. They would now compete for the title of national champion. The fourteen who appeared on the stage entered the contest with the scores they had earned in written exams held a few weeks earlier, as in the youth contests. Their ages ranged from people in their twenties and thirties to the oldest contestant, who was 54. They included two young women.

After the first round of questions – which I found to be easier than those given to the youth at their contest on Israel Independence Day – eight contes-
tants were left to participate in the second round. It was the earlier written tests which actually determined those who would continue, since all fourteen contestants answered the first round of oral questions correctly. However, the questions became more difficult in the second and third rounds and in the end there was an additional round between two contestants, Yonah Rosenberg from Kibbutz Sha'alvim and a 24-year-old soldier, Refael Meyuhas, whose scores were tied. Meyuhas finally emerged as the winner, beating his rival by one point. He received the first prize, a check for 30,000 NIS, while Rosenberg, the runner-up, received 20,000 NIS. The third prize of 10,000 NIS went to Gershon Avraham, from Haifa.

The program began with the lighting of the Hanukkah candles by Yosef Shaar, the Bible contest's veteran question writer. He was given the honor of reciting one of the blessings accompanied by soldiers of the IDF Rabbinate Choir. Between the rounds of questions, there were musical interludes based on biblical and traditional texts by a popular singer, Shlomo Gronich.

For a program which has not been around for thirty years one would have thought that there would be more public interest; but this was unfortunately not the case, even though it was featured on television and radio. I believe the reason was not only insufficient publicity before the adult contest but also the fact that it was an all-Israeli contest rather than an international one. Had this been an International Bible Contest for Adults with participants from different parts of the world, it would have generated greater public interest. One can only hope that future organizers of the adult _Hidon Ha-Tanakh_ will also open the contest to Jews from the Diaspora and not limit it to Israeli adults. If we think even further ahead, an adult Bible contest could be open to anyone of any religion willing to vie for the title of World Bible Champion.